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SUBJECT: BRUSSELS VIEW OF IRELAND'S EU PRESIDENCY: A HOME-STRETCH REPORT

REF: DUBLIN 686

Classified By: USEU/POL O'Hara, reasons 1.4 b and d

1.(C) Summary: As we approach next month's US/EU summit, we give the Irish a tentative B in how they've been dealing with issues of concern to the US. In general, we find the Irish to be reactively helpful honest brokers on most issues, but they have pushed their own agenda on the mid-East and Africa even if this means isolating the US. For most issues, from the war on terrorism, the Balkans, ESDP, and getting the EU to have a common asylum policy, the Irish have sought to be constructive and helpful. Even though the Irish are a "small" country Presidency with a very stretched Brussels presence, they have been attentive to transatlantic relations. End Summary

"Reactively Helpful" "Honest Brokers"

12. (C) In our interactions with the Irish Presidency in Brussels, we have found them "reactively helpful." They have not been particularly forthright in tipping us off about potential problems, but if we raise issues and concerns with them, they are responsive. (The Council and the Commission and other PermReps remain better sources of "early warning.") As is likely the case in Dublin, we found our Irish interlocutors friendly and open.

-- In particular, the Irish have been quite good about ensuring that US views are considered in internal EU discussion. For example, under the Irish Presidency's leadership, a French-led "rush" to lift the EU arms embargo against China was successfully slowed down. The Irish have been working to kick this issue down to the Dutch Presidency or possibly later. This has been in the US interest and the Irish deserve credit for their efforts (as does the lobbying of our embassies in member states).

-- Similarly, the Irish took pains to ensure that US views on nonproliferation were heard during the EU's decision-making process -- even as the Irish Presidency never wavered from its commitment to multilateral disarmament. While this meant that Irish and US objectives were at times at odds, their apparent sincerity in playing "honest broker" by ensuring that our views were given a proper hearing -- alongside their own -- in EU policy debates, is appreciated.

-- For the most part, the Irish did not push "effective multilateralism" as hard as we might have anticipated. The Commission and some EU member-states in Brussels see this concept as an effort to assert EU influence through the UN and other institutions to counterbalance US influence. We note that the Dutch have stressed that this will be theme for their forthcoming EU Presidency later this year.

Pushing their Agenda

13. (C//NF) However, when the Irish decide to drop their broker role and step up to pursue national or EU priorities, they sometimes have done this against US interests. On the May 6 Palestinian UNGA resolution on the status of the occupied Palestinian territory, the Irish cut a deal with the Palestinians, railroaded some member states (e.g. the Netherlands, ref) with an end result that isolated the US. The Irish Presidency did something similar at the UN Commission on Human Rights last month, when they cut a deal on Sudan with the African Union and then imposed the deal on other EU members. As with the UNGA resolution, the Irish determination to push their "deal" within the EU and on others left the US isolated.

Out of step with the US on Russia?

14. (SBU) At a recent US/EU task force, the Irish Presidency revealed ambivalence about a joint US/EU statement at the Summit recognizing joint US/EU actions in the former Soviet Union. Irish reps expressed concern that this could be seen by Moscow as anti-Russian. At the May 21 EU/Russia Summit, the Irish seemed content to pocket Russia's acceptance of EU enlargement and not worry about "deliverables" for Moscow

until the Dutch host their summit with Russia in the fall.

GME/Mid-East: reactive but how helpful?

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15. (SBU) While we can appreciate that the Irish have not picked transatlantic fights over the Mid-East, they (and most other members) have been hesitant to embrace a Greater Mid-East Initiative too warmly. The Presidency has been virtually invisible in Brussels so far, letting the Commission take the lead in discussing GME with the U.S. However, under Irish leadership, the Irish led an effort to forge a new EU strategy to the region, crafting helpful language on the need for political and economic reform and an enhanced role for women in the region, as well as on EU readiness to achieve "complementarity" with the U.S. Similar language was also inserted in the conclusions from the EU's May 5-6 Euromed ministerial with Arab countries in Dublin. From the EU perspective, the Irish have performed well in this defensive mode, remaining mildly responsive to our GME initiative while maintaining a separate profile for the EU's ties to the Arab world.

Constructive and helpful on ongoing "big issues"

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16. (C) Nonetheless, on balance the Irish have tried to move ahead in positive ways on a number of US interests. On ESDP, the Irish, based in part on their Partnership-for-Peace experience, have been very constructive in moving discussions of EU/NATO relations out of the rancorous political arena to technical experts level talks with a focus on practical details. The progress made to date on Bosnia transition owe much to this pragmatic approach. The Irish have been positive in US/EU interactions at the OSCE -- most recently at the US/EU OSCE experts level consultations in Brussels and also the recent OSCE anti-Semitism meeting in Berlin. The Irish have also been helpful on Liberia, strengthening asset freeze measures in the Balkans, getting internal EU agreement on asylum directives, and wrapping up internal EU agreement to go ahead with the common EU asylum procedures.

Cyprus/EU: On the Irish watch but not Dublin's "fault"

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17. (C) The Irish Presidency seems to have dodged the bullet for the EU's decision to admit a divided Cyprus into the EU on May 1. Although no one in the Council was willing to stand up and be counted prior to the referenda, the Irish leaned further forward than most in expressing support for the Annan plan and calling for a united Cyprus. Currently, the Brussels blame game is pointing to the Greek Cypriots, who now represent Cyprus as full EU members as the "spoilers" of this historic enlargement round. The Irish did put on a good show in Ireland of welcoming the new members and as such have been as appropriately supportive of the need to celebrate the EU's 10 new members. We don't foresee major decisions on Turkey's candidacy during the Irish Presidency, although we expect this to be a huge issue for the US and the EU during the Dutch Presidency.

Counter-Terrorism

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18. (SBU) Following the March 11 Madrid train bombing, the Irish succeeded in turning European fears about domestic vulnerabilities into a far-reaching commitment to "get serious" about the war on terrorism. Within days of the attack, the Irish had drafted a proposal calling on EU member states to speed implementation of previously agreed (but politically sensitive) measures to protect European citizens from terrorist attacks. They also advocated certain new measures, such as the creation of an "EU CT Czar," to make the EU a more effective and better coordinated player in the war on terrorism. The refined proposal emerged two weeks later as an ambitious and detailed declaration by EU leaders at their March 25 Summit in Brussels. This was a significant achievement for a Presidency with so little bureaucratic capacity for dealing with such a complex and sensitive policy area. In so doing, the Irish also helped to reinvigorate EU efforts in ways that should lead to a robust package in this area for the US/EU Summit.

Comment:

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19. (C) Our EU interlocutors are pleased to have a more normal Presidency after what they tended to see as Italy's erratic leadership. The Irish have been relatively successful at being a good "European" presidency. In particular, the Irish worked quite hard to "celebrate" EU enlargement, and have tried to move the EU constitutional process forward -- despite deep member-state disagreements. As a result, as the Irish seek to exercise their "political will" to move US/EU summit deliverables through the EU political process, they should be in a better position to deliver than the Italian Presidency.

